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CHAPTER 4

THE PEOPLE OF THE WHITE PRINCE

IN A.D. 1252 Mongol troops under the command of the prince who later reigned as the Emperor Yuan Shih Tsu—better known in Europe as Kublai Khan—captured Ta Li from the last ruler of the Kingdom of Nan Chao. From that time to the present day the Min Chia who inhabit that district have been subjects of the dynasties which successively ruled China. Some remnant of local authority was left to the descendants of the Tuan dynasty of Nan Chao during the Mongol (Yuan) period, but when the Chinese Ming dynasty drove out the Mongols and conquered Yunnan in 1383, even this shadow autonomy disappeared. Under the Ming Emperors and their Manchu successors Ta Li was reduced to the position of a prefecture of Yunnan province, politically on the same footing as any other city of the same rank in the Empire. The Republic abolished the distinction between prefectures, sub-prefectures and district cities (*Fu*, *Chou* and *Hsien*) renaming all as *Hsien* so that the old designation "Ta Li Fu," still found on many European maps, became obsolete, and the name used to-day is simply Ta Li.

The Mongol conquest does not seem to have been followed by any great immigration of Chinese settlers, although it is in this period that the Moslem community, originally mercenary soldiers of the conquerors, became established in the western part of Yunnan. The Ming conquest 130 years later was followed by a great immigration of Chinese, also originally soldiers, who settled in the uninhabited parts of Yunnan and probably in many places displaced unsophisticated tribesmen from the better lands. In the Min Chia country this process was restricted to the settlement of

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several Chinese families in the city itself, for there was no eviction of the Min Chia peasantry on the plain. As Ta Li had been the capital of Nan Chao it is probable that the neighbourhood was then populated by a peasantry who had already cultivated all the good land, and it was found more profitable to tax the existing population than to replace them with Chinese settlers.

Several tombs of Chinese families bearing dates from the early Ming period, the fifteenth century of the Christian Era, still stand on the slopes above Ta Li, attesting the fact of immigration and settlement by Chinese from the provinces of the lower Yang Tze valley, in which region the first Ming capital, Nanking, was established. Some of these families still remain in Ta Li to-day, and most of the old Chinese families of the place claim to have "come from Nanking" a phrase which means that their ancestors were natives of what we now call Kiangsu province. Whatever may have been the relationship between the conquerors and the Min Chia at that remote time, before long the racial distinction ceased to count as a political factor, and to-day there is no such thing as a Min Chia "nationality". The culture of the Min Chia still remains in many ways distinct, but the political fusion has become complete. The Kingdom of Nan Chao was in no sense a Min Chia kingdom, even though the district of the capital was then, as now, inhabited by Min Chia for it covered most of Yunnan and thus included a wide variety of peoples, from Tibetans and Li Su to Wa head hunters, even as the modern province of Yunnan does to-day. Even the dynasty of Nan Chao was more probably Shan than Min Chia, so that the change of rulers can hardly have seemed like a loss of independence to the men of that time.

There is thus at the present time nothing specifically Min Chia about the organisation of the government in Ta Li and the adjoining Hsien. These districts do not even follow the

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ethnographic boundary of the Min Chia people, for although the *Hsien* of Ta Li, Erh Yuan, and Chien Ch'uan, are wholly Min Chia, they overlap also into districts north, east and west of these three, which include communities of Chinese, Na Khi, Li Su and Tu Li. Nevertheless although the governmental system is identical with that in force in other parts of Yunnan and in China as a whole, it merits description for the very reason that, as the cadre in which Chinese civilisation operates, it is itself the principal cause of contact between the two cultures. It is well known that the Chinese Empire has for many centuries been ruled by a civil service of officials recruited by public examinations, and this civil service ranked higher and had greater authority than the military officers commanding the rather scanty garrisons stationed in the walled cities. After the Chinese revolution the old system fell into confusion, from which it has recently emerged, modernised, but in many respects unchanged. The civil officials of to-day are no longer recruited by annual examinations held in Peking or at some other great city, but they are required to be University graduates, and in recent years they are also required to pass a civil service examination, held in the provincial capital. Their military colleagues, who acquired inordinate power during the years of confusion following the revolution, are now slowly being brought under the control of the provincial government, from which they had largely escaped, and though endowed with more power than they possessed under the Manchu Empire, they can no longer override the civil power whenever they choose.

The *Hsien*, an area rather smaller than an English county, yet of considerable extent, is under the civil rule of the *Hsien Chang*, or Magistrate, who is responsible for the collection of taxes and the administration of justice within certain limitations. He is also in charge of the public works, administers

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634 such public property as forests, and controls the civil police force. The administration of justice is divided between the Magistrate, the High Court, and the Garrison Commander. The position of the latter is anomalous since his power is derived from the application of Martial Law to the crimes of banditry and high treason. This is a temporary measure for the pacification of the country, theoretically terminable when order has been completely restored, but likely to last in practice for many years yet. The reason is not so much that the country is disturbed, for banditry has been stamped out in western Yunnan, but that this power derived from martial law is in fact a legalisation of the usurped power of the military authorities originating in the years of turmoil which followed the revolution.

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Martial Law applies to banditry, which is defined as robbery under arms, with or without murder; and high treason, which means in practice armed opposition to the government, conspiring against the government, or—up till 1937—assisting or belonging to the Chinese Communist Party. This last offence is only of academic interest in the Ta Li region, which was never affected by the Communist movement, and since the agreement between the Communist rebels and the Central Government upon the outbreak of war with Japan, it is no longer a crime to be a Communist. Criminal offences not included in the scope of Martial Law, such as murder without intent to rob, robbery without arms, seduction of an unmarried girl, forgery and embezzlement are tried by the Magistrate in his court. Sentence of death has to be confirmed by the Governor of the Province and is then carried out by the military authorities.

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The Chinese reformed civil code is in force in Yunnan, but in out of the way areas such as Ta Li, where the provisions of the new code are usually very little known either to the public or to the officials, the actual practice of the